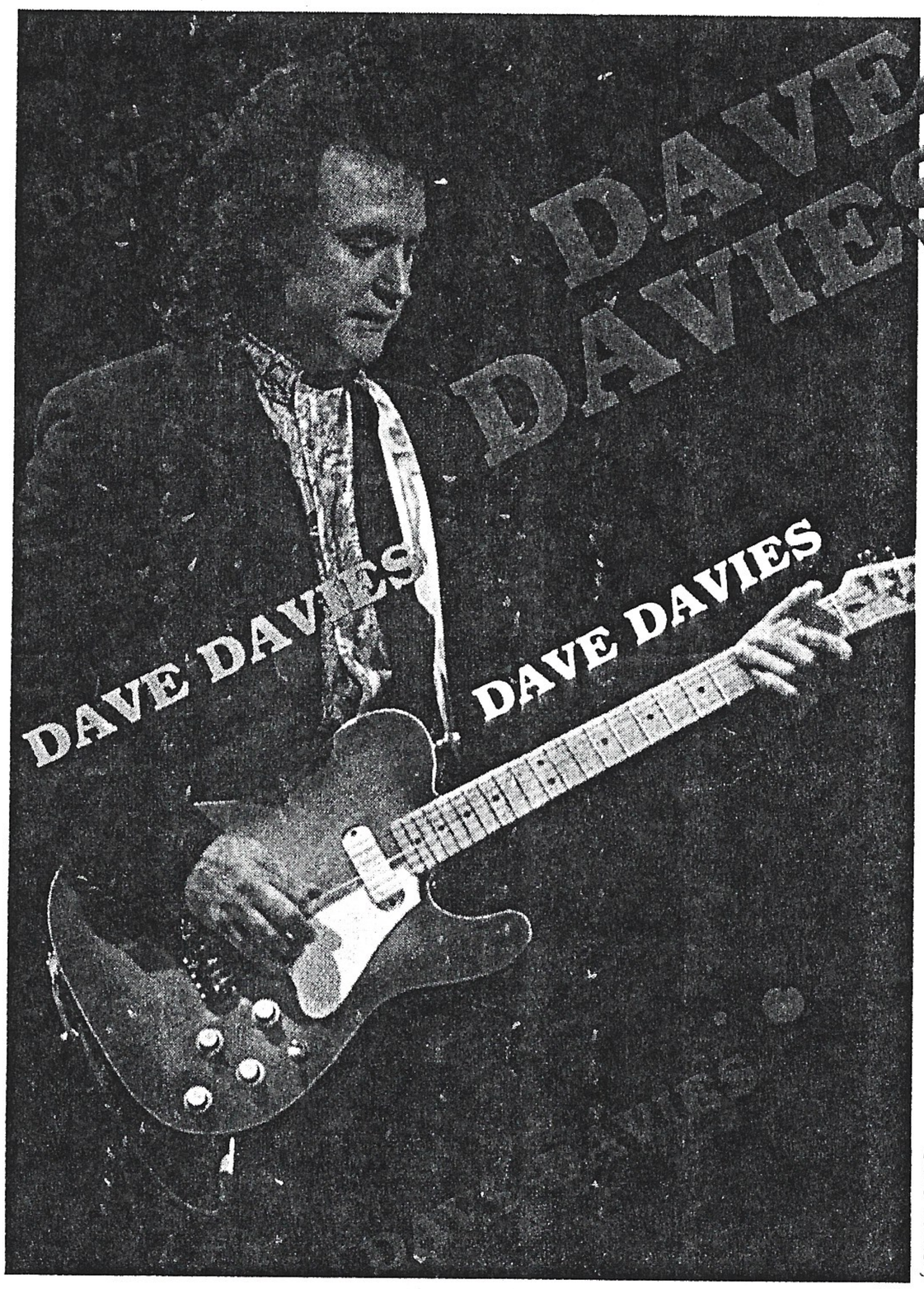
DAVE DAVIES
THE KINKS
OUT OF THE ORDINARY

BY DANNY McCUE

Dave "The Rave" Davies, lead guitarist and founding member of the Kinks, sits in a straight-backed chair next to a simple table, in the lobby of the Parker-Meridian Hotel in New York City. Perhaps indicative of the Meridian's reputation as a musician's hotel—as I waited for Davies, a band checked out; during the interview, Gene Simmons walked by, flipping down his shades—no one interrupts us for an autograph. Davies apologizes for being slightly sleepy. "You've caught me first thing in the morning," he chuckles, before sitting down. Soon he begins to peel off the years, as he talks about his earliest guitar experiences. Prior to the Kinks, Dave was a big fan of the Ventures.

"I think the Ventures were a fantastic band. I used to like their B-sides. I remember one they had out called 'No Trespassing.' It's fabulous. It's quite heavy for the time, and the rhythm guitar player was actually the first I ever heard who played just the three strings that comprised the bass notes, rather than the whole chord. That was a good excuse not to play the whole thing. Pete Quaife, who was one of the original members of the Kinks, and I, had a band at school and we used to do instrumental things."



Steve Kalinsky

Thus, the genesis of the sound of the most famous band to come out of Muswell Hill, North London. The band at this point was called the Ravens, and Dave's brother Ray, soon to be the architect of international hits, was still at college and exploiting his connections with the local jazz scene, earning extra money as a rhythm guitarist and harmonica player with the Dave Hunt Blues Band. Dave Davies, in the meantime, worked on his image, patterned after Eddie Cochran. His mother gave him the down payment for his first guitar, a Harmony Meteor; the hire/purchase card, which he still has, bears the marks of a series of 30 shilling payments. "The trouble is, I haven't got the guitar, which is a bit sad." In 1963, Ray Davies left Dave Hunt and became a permanent member of brother Dave's band; shortly thereafter, they became the Kinks.

"Until Ray decided to make it with our band, the people he played with were coming out of the jazz-influenced side of music, and I think what we were doing was more unique, purely rock and blues influenced, and something the musicians he had been working with looked down on. There's this great film, 'Jazz on a Summer's Day' (a documentary of the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival). It was

one of Chuck Berry's first appearances at a major festival, and he was the only real rock 'n' roller on it. His back-up band was a jazz band, and he was playing out of tune and yet he was great, and you could see in that film that those musicians sitting behind him really didn't like him. They were looking down on him. But he knew he had something. I found that a really big influence."

The film had another influence on the band, which was signed to Pye Records by producer Shel Talmy, in January 1964. It inspired the record which, after two flops—a cover of "Long Tall Sally" and an obscure original, "You Still Want Me"—became the first record by a native combo other than the Beatles to sell a million copies in Britain alone. "Ray was a great fan of Gerry Mulligan, who was in that film, and as he sat at the piano at home, he sort of messed around in a vein similar to Mulligan and came up with this figure based on a 12 bar blues—if you were in G, you'd go to C—from that we wanted to do a variation on the blues, so we decided we'd go from G to A and A to D. [When we recorded] "You Really Got Me," it was like we were running out of time in the studio, because we re-recorded it after deciding we didn't like the original version, which was slower. It was like, whatever I did was what we used, and if you hear it, it's got that anxiety about it (laughs), 'They're going to throw us out of the studio any minute!'"

Talmy offers another reason, besides re-recording, for the Kinks' early rushed sessions: "One of the problems, which I tried to keep from them, was the guy who ran Pye at the time was one of the worst people I ever had the displeasure of meeting," he says, a day after the interview with Davies. "He was really a bastard, even as inexpensive as things were in comparison to now, in terms of, 'You can't spend more than this, and if you do, it's coming out of your (meaning my) bread, as opposed to the band's.' I tried not to rush them, but in many ways, I had a gun to my head."

Talmy used three different microphones to capture the sound of Davies' guitar; one to capture the sound of the strings, up near the fretboard, one near Dave's amp, a Marshall, and another, more distant from the amp. "I'm sure he told you he used a razorblade on the cone and that he kicked the amplifier to get that fuzz," says Talmy. "That's true, and it was my job to then translate that onto tape."

Recalls Davies: "I didn't like any of the guitar amps we had at the time, and I got ahold of this little amplifier from a radio shop that was just up the road. It was only a little 10 or 12 watt amplifier, and one day, in a fit of frustration, I cut up the speakers with a razorblade. That's how I started to get the distorted sound [that carried over to the records]."

By early 1965, after the monstrous success of "You Really Got Me" and its follow-up, the equally power-chord heavy "All Day and All of the Night," the Kinks, despite charting better than such good natured rivals as the Rolling Stones—who leaked a story to a Fleet Street daily that one of the Kinks had six toes on each foot—felt a need to switch gears or else be trapped in one groove. The result was "Tired of Waiting for You."

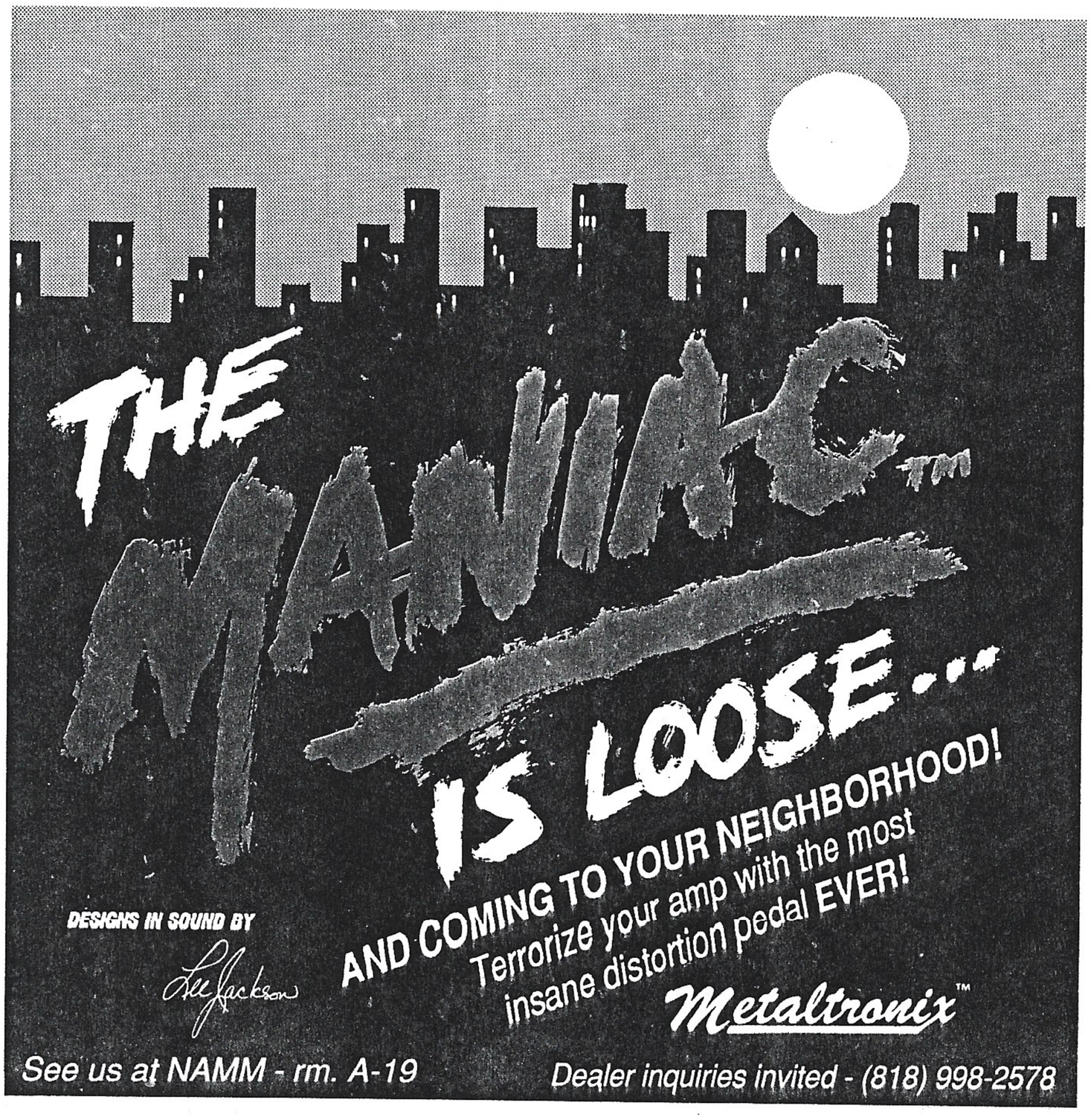
"It's a ballad, isn't it?" asks Davies. "That was the first hit ballad—'hit ballad,' that sounds really weird—that we ever had. That song had been around quite some years. It was an instrumental that Ray and I used to play together—'cause Ray's a good guitar picker, really—and then he wrote a lyric to it and we recorded it, but it didn't sound right. The guitar parts weren't strong enough. So I went in and put the heavier rhythm guitar part on last, after it was finished."

The Live Kinks, recorded a full three years before the Stone's *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* and released a decade before *The Beatles Live at the Hollywood Bowl*, provides a Pandora's Box-top look into an era when screeching girls were louder than the band onstage and the Kinks were loose enough to 'interpolate' the *Batman* television show theme into their set. A few nights after it was recorded, Dave Davies was knocked unconscious during a concert in London, resulting in the rest of the tour being cancelled.

"It was a weird period, because you'd get up onstage and you'd play for like ten minutes, and they'd be screaming at you—there was no point in actually playing—we used to have a little private bet before some gigs; we'd say, 'Well, are we going to be onstage 10 minutes tonight, or 12, or 20?' And some nights you might have a little bit more to drink, thinking you'd only be onstage for 15 minutes. I'm sure that happened."

Asked if he found the situation frustrating as a guitarist, Davies replied, "It was dreadful, but I liked it. That period was a lark, and it was only after a few years, when things started to settle down a little, that we realized that we were doing this for a living, and that we'd better relearn our instruments."

With that new sense of dedication to their craft also came an emerging devotion on the part of the principle writer, Ray, to the habits, quirks, and small pleasure taken by a typically middle-class Englishman—as witnessed by the string of singles that followed: "A Well Respected Man," "Dedicated Follower



of Fashion," and "Sunny Afternoon." The songs also showed off another side of Dave Davies' guitar playing, the perfect accompanist for an evening in an old fashioned English music hall.

"The blues influence is always there, but you can't help but be influenced by what's going on around you. At that time, Ray was probably the only writer doing what they used to call 'social commentary.' Later things we did, people didn't like, especially when we touched on the period of *Arthur* (an Lp originally commissioned as a teleplay by UK Granada TV; its subject is an ordinary man reflecting on his life), which I got great satisfaction out of. When we started to do that, I really thought, 'This is what the Kinks really mean. This is what we're going for.' And it was not accepted in England at all. People got the wrong end of the stick."

It should be noted that the Kinks took the pastoral route at precisely the same time that the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper* and Clapton was "God." Davies addresses the divergence in style: "I suppose we always felt like misfits in a way. Whenever there was a trend, we always stood out of the way to let it pass." And then, with a little instigation, he takes on the idea of the holy guitar triumverate—Clapton, Beck, and Page. "Maybe I'm a bit obstinate, but I didn't really feel they affected me. I thought it was strange at the time when Jimmy Page thought that he invented the guitar at one point. Really, I think [the concept] was just another side effect of the drugs, and the ego and the glamour of the time. I think it got a bit carried away. Page actually played tambourine on one of our records, and all of a sudden he's got these great delusions that he's partly responsible for some of the Kink's music, which he wasn't."

"Lola," which was a big chart hit in 1970, heralded the Kinks' return to mainstream success. "'Lola' was written in a similar way to 'You Really Got Me.' We got together in Ray's front room, and Ray had the basic idea of the song, the skeleton idea for this song, and I just started playing E in the bottom position, moved it up to A, leaving the E string open and in the chord. Ray said, 'Ah, that's great. Let's put that in as well.' [As a songwriter] Ray has a very firm idea about what he wants to do, and I try to accommodate him as best I can, but I think in certain areas, on certain songs, there's a lot more collaboration than people realize. Although Ray and I don't get on particularly well, there's a lot of empathy and unspoken energy that goes toward the finished product.

"I think a rock 'n' roll record should start off being a song and should end up being a song. I think that everything

around it should be complementary to it, or help it to evolve, rather than get in its way. I've always tried to keep that in mind as a guitar player. Rather than say, 'Let's start with the guitar and a 16 bar solo.' It's the song that's important, and the individual parts add to it."

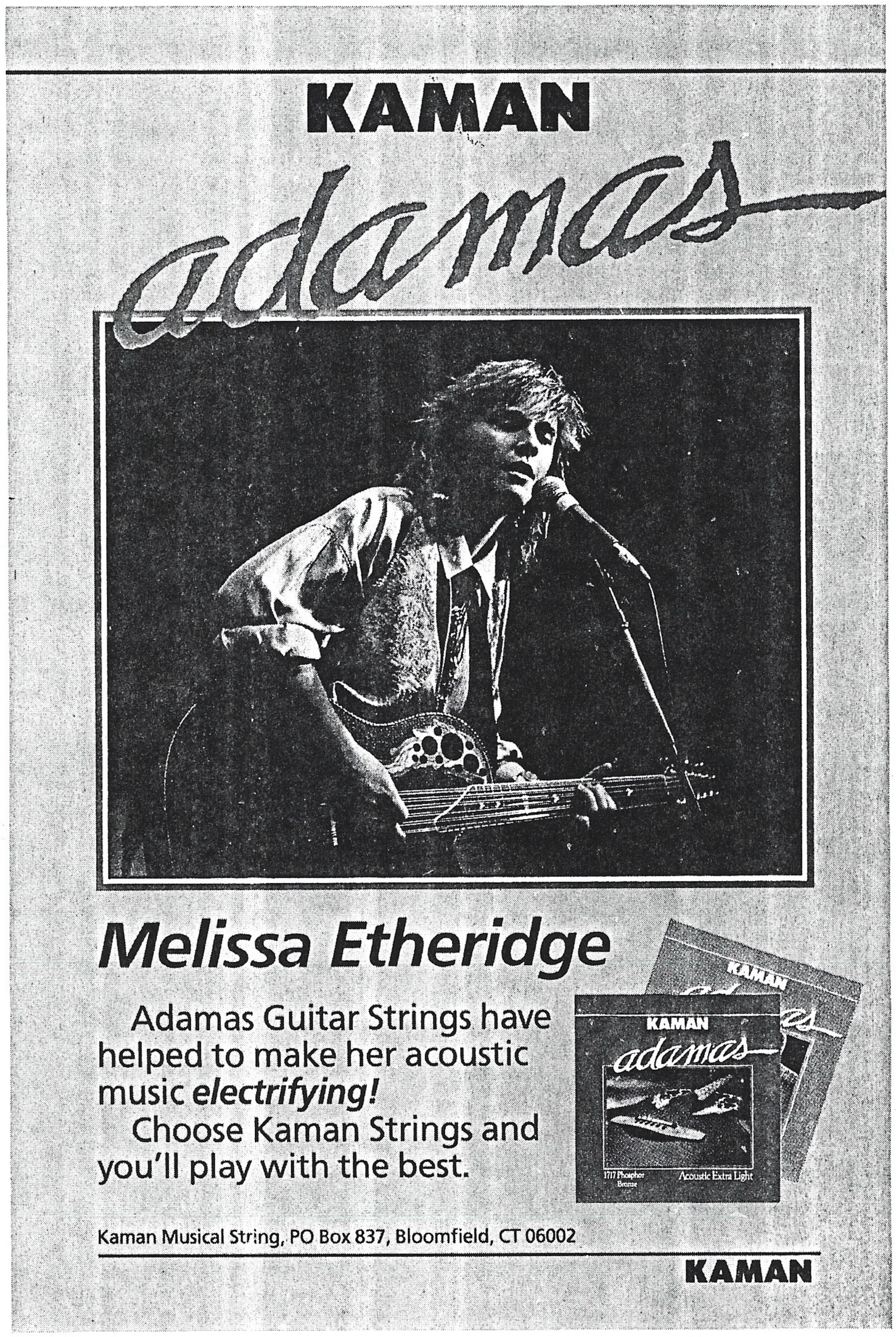
The band, ever volatile internally, went through another of its episodic down periods in the mid-70s, finding its way again after a label change, at this juncture from RCA to Arista, and the release of *Sleepwalker*, their finest overall effort of the decade. They also got an unexpected career boost from bands copying their old hits, something Davies

considers a compliment; but in the case of one of the most famous, he harbors a slight twinge of misgiving. On Van Halen's version of "You Really Got Me," Dave says, "It's flattering, but it was sort of techno-flashy, which I think is not how the whole force behind the song came about. The song came out of a working class environment, people fighting for something, whereas Van Halen's version sounds like people who've got everything they need. It's not the same feeling, but it's flattering nonetheless."

In 1979, the Kinks released *Low Budget*, and the single off the album, "I Wish I Could Fly Like) Superman"—a disco flavored tune—became their biggest hit in years. On its heels, they began three years of constant touring. "I think that one was, not the biggest mistake, but it could've been one of the biggest mistakes we made. I remember I had quite a difficult time with Ray while we were making the record, because I didn't like the direction it was going. It was a strange time for music in general, anyway. The fact that it's funny, that it was a humorous song, saved it. I don't feel bad about that song at all, but it could have been a big mistake."

After peaking commercially with *One for the Road*, one of the great live albums of any era, the Kinks have gone through a peculiar time in the 80s, the most obvious symptom being a tendency on the part of Ray Davies to recycle the songs of their own past, like "Destroyer," a riff-by-riff recreation of "All Day and All of the Night," and "Sleazytown," a recasting of their late 70's ode to Arab oil interests, "Gallon of Gas." It's something that has led to a series of Dave Davies solo albums: *PL 1 3603*, *Glamour*, and *Chosen People*, but as the Kinks are his reputation, one has to wonder if he's felt more limited of late.

"Yeah, sometimes," he says. "It got to a point that whenever we were going to play something in G, I'd say, 'I don't want to do it in G. Let's try another key.' You can't just sit down and play "You Really Got Me" riffs the rest of your life. That's why a lot of heavy metal tends to fall down for me, because it starts to sound like you can take the members of one band and put them in other bands and it'll sound similar to how it sounded before. You've got to try and develop individual clarities and uniqueness."

Today, touring behind *U.K. Jive*, the Kinks first album since disbanding temporarily at the conclusion of their '88 tour, Dave Davies finds peace of mind in the fact that three of his own compositions, "Bright Lights," "Perfect Strangers," and "Sweet Margaret," wound up on the new album. Previously, he'd been allowed only a single song per Lp (about the same as George Harrison's quota on Beatles' records). And although something of an elder statesman, he still gets a guitar out in his hotel room when on tour, "Playing for enjoyment. I practice, but then I start writing songs; trying to play something I never played before." Onstage, he prefers a Fender Elite, a limited edition, which he likes because the feel, he says, is like that of a Telecaster, while the pickups are a little ballsier than the standard Tele's. "They suit my playing, because I don't like to fiddle around too much with different sounds onstage. I like to keep things simple and I find I can play light things with a clean sound, and do heavier things without too much messing around. They're a good workhorse."

Summing up his place in the guitar scheme of things, Davies is unabashedly frank. "Without sounding too modest," he says, "I think that guitar sound circa 'You Really Got Me,' and 'All Day and All of the Night,' has influenced more guitarists than any other. To think that people are still doing that riff, or that sound based on that sort of riff; it's quite good really. It makes me sort of feel like I invented the Dam Buster—a bomb they invented in England that would bounce on the water until it came to a Dam, then blow up." He shrugs. "Not that that's a particularly good thing to invent, a bomb."